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Human Resource Development (HRD) Resilience: A new 'Success Element' of Organizational Resilience?

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Title Page

Human Resource Development (HRD) Resilience: A new ‘Success Element’ of Organizational Resilience?

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Introduction

Nowadays, organizations confront various micro and macro environmental challenges, and business world becomes turbulent faster than organizations become resilient. High sophisticated, in business terms, organizations are expected to perform at higher levels when environmental pressures escalate, threats ascend and uncertainty intensifies (Boin & Van Eeten, 2013). However, an important question could be raised about the extent to which such an

organizational capacity is derived from their strategically designed business processes or if it is as an outcome of improvisation and/or pure luck.

Prominent literature on organizational resilience defines the term under two different themes: 'recovery' and 'precursor'. The former illustrates an organizational ability to respond to singular or unique events in order to pick up to previous business conditions (Foster, 1993), while the latter refers to the ability of accustoming change and absorbing shocks gracefully (Kendra & Wachtendorf, 2003). From an organizational point of view, 'recovery resilience' is more reactive in nature as organizations simply focus on returning to a prior state after the shocking event occurred. Contrariwise, 'precursor or strategic resilience' is viewed as a proactive business response to unexpected conditions, and refers to a firm's capacity of identifying the opportunities within a crisis event to further expand its capabilities, to create new business opportunities, and eventually to become stronger (Sullivan-Taylor et al., 2009; Jamrog et al., 2006). Eventually, successful businesses are those focusing on building and maintaining "precursor" resilience, since a turnaround is viewed as a delayed response to business and economic turbulence and uncertainty. In line with this suggestion, Vaughan (1990) argued that, through proactive management actions and decision-making processes, organizations could reduce risk simply by increasing their sensitivity against on-going business change, as well as through enhancing their operational excellence and competitive advantage. Empirical evidence further outlines the crucial role of proactively obtaining relevant information to design effective strategic plans to cope with business uncertainty (Miller et al., 2004). All of which contribute in building organizational resilience in those turbulent business and economic times.

With that in mind, having many theorists and researchers extensively talked about the strategic business-partnering role of HRD in organizations, organizational resilience could be informed by an HRD input (HRD resilience). Thus, HRD resilience could be viewed as a new

success element that, complemented by other contributors, could individually and/or collectively enhance organizational resilience. Especially within the complex days we live (e.g. Global financial crisis, Brexit, workforce global movement etc.), HRD should lead organizational change, as well as to contribute to organizational resilience through its policies and strategies. However, neither there is a definition of HRD resilience nor much are written on this particular topic. Therefore, having both issues addressed could set the foundational points of HRD resilience within the respective literature. Before getting there though, it would be nice to present an overview of the relevant literature/research focusing on organizational resilience.

Organizational Resilience in a nutshell

Past research on organizational resilience has been widely conducted within the field of psychology (Collins & Porras, 1994), as well as in relation to physical sciences (Horne, 1998), having the term being described as a firm's ability to rebound to a previous normal state after facing an unexpected and stressful event. Appropriately, organizational resilience can be defined as a firm's ability to accommodate change fortunately by utilising its strengths and identifying potential environmental opportunities through eliminating its weaknesses and any threats present within their external environment (Hamel & Valikangas, 2003). Yet, most organizations increasingly neglect the employment of their organizational capabilities to build strategic resilience, as well as to develop and quickly apply new initiatives and business strategies to sustain competitive advantage (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2009). Therefore, the alignment of the HRD strategies and practices with the respective business ones could enhance organizational resilience through the strategic management of human capital in organizations.

Lately, much focus was placed on individual resilience through which organizational resilience could also emerge through people's interaction within a broader organizational

structure (Tonkin et al., 2018). Mishra and McDonald (2017) and Ngoasong and Groves (2016) argued that individuals' career resilience (e.g. individual's ability to bounce back to previous state in response to career-related challenges) could be seen as an important element of organizational resilience as well. Employees' capacity to address organizational change is highlighted, with relevant studies to pinpoint that resilient individuals are more capable of coping with fast-changing workplaces (Shin et al., 2012; Clardy, 2008). Bonanno (2004) examined individual and organizational resilience in terms of responding to environmental conditions, and emphasized on individuals' ability to improvise under crises circumstances. The author argued that such improvisation could have been the outcome of strategic HR interventions focusing on the development of a "psychological human capital". Relatedly, Luthans et al. (2010) identified that proactive HR investments (psychological capital enhancement), and reactive practices (e.g. employees' assistance programs), both can enhance individual resilience, resulting to enhanced organizational resilience respectively. Their empirical research highlighted that T&D interventions can lead to on-the-job performance improvements (ibid). In this regard, Jiang et al. (2012) further explained that numerous HR strategic practices could enhance resilience through the employment of psychological resources mainly focusing on "positive psychology" of a psychological capital. Accordingly, a most recent study from Bardoel et al. (2014) highlighted a set of HR practices to promote individual resilience. The authors proposed the development and delivery of resilience training for diverse employees, while others pinpointed establishment of risk and management systems within the organizational context as potential contributors (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Haggerty & Wright, 2010; Lepak et al., 2004). Complementary, other studies identified that particular HR practices (e.g. workforce redundancies, organizational downsizing, cost reduction policies etc.) can negatively affect employees' resilience as they often create backlash results (Gunnigle et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2011). While these works relate organizational resilience with an

organization's HR approach, they do not specifically indicate whether these practices (mostly HR – not HRD) could serve as sole contributors of organizational resilience. As there are also other business processes and structures, coupled with a range of internal and external forces, all of which can influence organizational resilience (e.g. financial capacity, favourable institutional factors etc.), it is not clear whether strategic HR practices in general, and HRD practices in particular, can have a significant influential impact on organizational resilience.

Arguably, HR, in general, could play an important role on building individual resilience through its strategic and proactive approach. However, it would be good to bring forward HRD practices as distinctive contributors of organizational resilience. The extent to which HRD could prove sensitive to recessionary shocks through enhancing its strategic positioning and increasing its value proposition while minimizing its adversity, all could feature essential elements in contributing to organizational resilience. To do so, HRD professionals should offer well-designed HRD strategies, plans and policies which will be focusing both on resilient short- and long-term results, either if the focus is on the individual and/or the organization; thus, to talk about resilient practices that associate with the core HRD principles (e.g. individual development, performance management, career development, organizational development).

With that in mind, the present perspective article calls HRD scholars and practitioners to discuss the ways through which human resource development resilience could be built. Having that done, we would be able to argue for HRD resilience as a new 'success element' of organizational resilience. Yet, we need to come with an agreed definition for the term, as well as to apply and test it through empirical research in the future, maybe by employing prominent HRD/SHRD models being available to our hands.

Human Resource Development (HRD) Resilience as a new “success element” of organizational resilience

To talk about HRD resilience, it would be appropriate to come up with a definition of the term to help us set its foundational points. Drawing upon definitions of organizational resilience, to a similar extent, HRD resilience could be defined as *the extent to which HRD practices could survive, develop or degrade under a crisis-situation, business uncertainty and/or business restructuring through demonstrating a flexible, adaptive and agile approach to any kind of internal or external forces*. The definition comes in line with that of “precursor” resilience, thus suggesting a proactive and strategic role for HRD in organizations. Based on this definition, the HRD focus shifts from just improving organizational performance in enhancing the “strategicness” of HRD through attaining a strategic business partnership role rather than be seen as an administrative business function (Lawler & Bourdeau, 2009).

Following Youndt and Snell’s (2004) suggestion that most of the potential influential factors of organizational resilience is out of its direct control, the empirical investigation and evaluation of the resilience of HRD practices could prove important in identifying particular dimensions of an organization’s capacity for resilience, especially under business and economic uncertainty and complexity. Thereafter, HRD resilience could be viewed as a new ‘success element’ of organizational resilience by the time its practices could feature the characteristics suggested through defining the term. Precisely, HRD practices could be flexible in terms of changing quickly and at the minimum cost; adaptive in terms of re-establishing fit with the changing environments; and agile on the subject of developing and implementing adroit competitive moves. Although, someone may argue that these abilities are part of an organization’s reactive response, the definition calls for a stronger interrelation between its elements, without amplifying on one to the exclusion of the other, even if the emphasis given to each may vary over time.

Moving beyond Bardoel et al. (2014) suggestion that social support at work, work-life balance practices and employees' assistance programs, could promote individual resilience, HRD resilience instead focuses mostly on particular HRD principles (e.g. individual development, performance management, career development, and organisational development) through which both individual and organizational resilience could be developed. Given the evolving nature of the HRD field, HRD resilience outcomes (e.g. emotional and career resilience) can be built through learning, training and developmental approaches, which could assist employees and firms in enhancing individual and organizational resilience to cope with the endlessly and increasingly complex business world. That will eventually enhance the strategic positioning of HRD in organizations, further positioning it as a strategically contributing business function. Along with all other HR practices that could enhance individual resilience, HRD resilience could be presented as a unique "success ingredient" of organizational resilience through the enhancement of employees' emotional resilience that will eventually get them into a better position to perform their duties upon unleashing their full potential.

To support the suggestions we make, a conceptual framework of HRD resilience (app.1) is suggested to illustrate the importance of HRD resilience (and of its elements) to organizational resilience, presenting all metaphorically as a 'resilience cog machine', with its biggest cog to associate with HRD resilience. With prominent research on organizational resilience focusing mainly on the two smallest cogs of the resilience cog machine (app.1), we argue that a new and bigger cog (HRD resilience) could make a difference; subsequently for HRD resilience to be seen as a new success ingredient of organizational resilience. The framework implies that HRD resilience, along with all environmental forces being at play and individual/organizational resilience developed from other processes, could highly contribute to sustained individual and organizational resilience, which could help organizations during turbulent and uncertain business and economic times. Metaphorically, the biggest cog could turn the smallest ones

easier and to both directions, making the resilience cog machine to work better and more effectively.

Directions for future research

The ‘HRD resilience’ term could be further elaborated through building on the suggested conceptual framework and further developing it. Future research could also look at how HRD resilience could associate with organizational innovation and creativity, change restructuring etc., all essential elements of a resilient organization.

Having HRD resilience supported by strong evidence through the strategic components of prominent SHRD models (Mitsakis, 2019, 2017; Garavan, 2007; Robinson & Robinson, 2005; Boudreau & Ramstad, 2004; Gilley & Gilley, 2003; Becker et al., 2001; Dwyer, 2000; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000a, 2000b; McCracken & Wallace 2000a, 2000b; Pfeffer, 1998; Ulrich, 1998; Lee, 1996; Torraco and Swanson, 1995; Garavan, 1991), future research could support and develop this new proposition, as well as to further strengthen the strategic positioning of HRD in organizations, and enhance its equal strategic business partnering role.

In addition, future research would also benefit through a multi-consistent research evaluation of HRD resilience in organizations to illustrate different stakeholders’ perceptions of HRD readiness in crises circumstances.

Since resilience represents a construct that comes with multiple definitions, HRD resilience would benefit from a definitional consensus to set the agenda for future studies on this particular topic. The definition provided earlier could set the foundational points for such definitional consensus by initiating a dialogue on this particular topic amongst HRD scholars and practitioners.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: A Resilience Cog Machine - A conceptual framework of HRD resilience as a “new success ingredient” of organizational resilience



Changes made in red (HRD resilience – perspective article)

- Abstract and introduction revised to explain better why we need to pay attention to HRD resilience (why now)
- The HRD resilience section reorganised (deletions & add-ons) to avoid descriptiveness and to offer more space to explain further the main argument on HRD resilience on the following section and within
- Transitional sentences added to link together all sections.
- The conceptual framework revised to illustrate better the main argument made.